

Long-term care has become a factory assembly line according to care worker

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(Stock)

NOTE: *This story was corrected and updated to include the fact that Ontario's COVID-19 Long-Term Care Commission has already begun.*

An online town hall meeting for long-term care in Northern Ontario was told that patient care in some homes has become like a “factory assembly line”.

The Facebook video-conference event was hosted Thursday evening by Mushkegowuk—James Bay MPP Guy Bourgouin and Algoma Manitoulin MPP Mike Mantha; both Ontario New Democrats. Panellists included Catherine Joyce, a personal support worker from Manitoulin Island and Linda

Semczyszyn, chair of board of directors at the North Centennial Manor, a long-term care home in Kapuskasing.

The group took questions and comments from online Facebook participants.

One of the first questions began with a comment that there is no need to do another study to find out what is wrong with long-term care. The commenter said better national standards are needed for sufficient care time spent with patients, better training for personal support workers (PSWs) and more accountability from LTC homes. Bourgouin asked Mantha to comment.

Mantha said he agreed the issues were the same as those being brought forward by MPPs for several years. Mantha agreed with the need for a basic level of hands-on care, but he said the current government and the previous Liberal governments have not carried through with any legislation to make it mandatory. Mantha also spoke for the need for better recruiting and more training for PSWs.

Catherine Joyce, the veteran PSW from Manitoulin, said the early PSW courses were inadequate and work-placements were difficult with some of the students quitting the program because it was too rushed and too difficult. She said the course has been expanded now to a one-year program as it should.

Joyce said as far as she could remember, there have been calls for minimum-time levels of hands-on care with long-term patients, as the current work demands mean no one can give patients enough care.

"There is no free time. Your entire eight-hour shift is scheduled down to 15 minutes, if not more of all the things you need to get completed. There is no time for somebody who needs a shoulder to cry on or to sit down with somebody while they have a coffee to talk about memories or something they're going through. There is no time to take that 15 minutes to chat with somebody."

Joyce said minimum care requirements would mean providing enough additional staff to care for people appropriately.

She said the current approach is like "a factory assembly line" when dealing with patients.

"Get them up, get them dressed, get them out, feed them. Get them back, get them down. Get them up. Feed them. It's just the same thing. Constantly. It's just a factory," said Joyce.

On hearing that, Bourgouin commented that it sounded like they're caring for animals instead of human beings.

Also commenting was Linda Semczyszyn who said the shortage of workers described by Joyce was "so true" and the shortage of PSWs is the biggest complaint she faces at the North Centennial Manor in Kapuskasing.

"They can't spend the time they want with the patients," she said. "It is basically bathing, dressing, feeding. In Kapuskasing, we have 78 beds and they do not have the time to do anything more. They depend a lot of volunteers and family members to help out," she added.

"They are paying good money to be in a home. We're trying to give them the Cadillac service by following all the guidelines and the requirements, but there is not enough money for staff, for PSWs and for pay increases."

Semczyszyn said it is a demanding job and hard work for the PSWs.

"I wouldn't be able to do it. It takes very special people to work in that environment."

Semczyszyn also referred to the ongoing issues with home care, where patients who are not sick enough to be in a hospital are sent home to recover with assistance to be provided by home care workers.

She spoke about her grandmother who broke her hip and was sent home without any home care assessment because of a shortage of workers. Although she qualified for home care, the woman had to wait 97 days before any personal care was provided because she was on a waiting list, said Semczyszyn.

The hour-long forum also spoke about the need for legislation to provide enough time to provide hands-on for long-term care residents. Mantha said efforts have been made to get the legislation passed, but there is never enough support at Queen's Park to make it happen. Mantha said it was frustrating, but promised that it was something he and his colleagues would continue to fight for.

Another concern raised by online participants, in the comments column, was the desire for long-term care homes to be more open in allowing family members visiting rights to see elderly patients more often.

Other commenters mentioned the need to increase the rate of pay for PSWs, enough to slow down the turnover rate for those workers. Similar sentiments have been expressed at other public forums about long-term care homes.

Mantha also voiced his desire to have a formal public inquiry into the many problems identified with long-term care homes in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, which is in line with the [stated policy of Ontario New Democrats](#). So far, that demand has not been acknowledged by Ontario

governing Progressive Conservatives. Ontario has instead announced a [commission to investigate](#) the many complaints and inadequacies of long-term care homes. [That commission has already begun.](#)

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Len Gillis is a Local Journalism Initiative reporter at [Sudbury.com](https://www.sudbury.com) covering health care in northeastern Ontario and the COVID-19 pandemic.

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